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**The Missionaries in the Race for Putting the Veda to Print:
Rev. John Stevenson and His *Threefold Science* of 1833**

SUMMARY: The early 1800s saw several competing projects of opening the hitherto guarded textuality of the Veda to a wider public, both in Europe and in India. Apart from those animated by the spirit of imperial control or allegedly pure academic interest, others situated themselves within broader goals of the new wave of missionary work in India. Among the Protestant missionaries to take active part in projects of that sort, the exceptional figure of Rev. John Stevenson of the Church of Scotland stands conspicuously unparalleled. The paper intends to follow the circumstances of the publishing and to offer an idea about the complex ideology that might have accompanied Stevenson's pioneering work in editing and translating of the Veda, especially his work titled *The Threefold Science* that appeared in 1833 in Bombay.

KEYWORDS: Veda, print cultures, missionaries, modernity

It was around 1674 when Bhim Parekh of Surat tried to convince the East India Company authorities that it would be good for the general public to publish the knowledge kept by the brahmins. A visionary Gujarati trader catering for the Company, Bhim Parekh was not the first to take interest in the secret knowledge of the Veda. But he appears to be the first to entertain an idea of putting the Veda into print. His early vision of retrieving the heritage of the Brahmanical knowledge with the help of the new technology of print has been recorded in his letters to the Board of Directors of the East India Company in London.¹ The letters show his keen interest in the power of print and

¹ See *English Records on Shivaji* 1931: 187 and 327, and Priolkar 1958: 31.

his intention to convince the Company executives that exposing and opening the otherwise inaccessible textuality of the Brahmanical knowledge to the wider public could be useful in terms of public interest. Bhim Ji Parekh of Surat invested his own inventiveness and resources in convincing the Company's authorities to agree and effectively to import from England and set up a printing press in Surat towards 1675.² Representing a social class for which any tangible access to the Veda remained, by principle, rather improbable, if not impossible, he apparently conceived of laying his hands on the Veda kept by the brahmins as an act of disclosure of a hidden treasure. In this sense he found himself on the same side as all those before and after him who strove, often in vain, to get access to the imagined Veda believed to remain in the exclusive possession of its traditional guardians, the brahmins. We may only speculate on how much Bhim Parekh could know about what the Veda actually was and how he imagined to get hold of any of the Vedic texts before preparing it for print. Although eventually unsuccessful, Bhim Ji Parekh's project marked a beginning to a long line of efforts on the part of Europeans and their allies to identify, disclose and see the Veda through the printing press.³ One of the earliest pronounced hopes of that sort belongs to William Carey, a Baptist Missionary who has been credited with launching a veritable media revolution from the Danish enclave of Serampore, not far from Calcutta, where he set his first printing press with a bunch of collaborators (McNeely-Wolverton 2007: 169). Before long their establishment would produce primarily translations of the Bible in as many as 40 languages, but soon after editions of other important works and grammars of vernacular languages, and later also other printed matter, before it collapsed and had to merge with another publisher due to heavy debts, towards 1830. In one of his letters, dated to 1802 and published by his collaborator not much later, Carey declared:

² For historical details of the printing project by Bhim Ji Parekh, see Priolkar 1958: 30–33 and Blackburn 2006.

³ I am elaborating this topic in Galewicz forthcoming.

I have long wished to obtain a copy of the Veda; and am now in hopes I shall be able to procure all that are extant [...] If I succeed, I shall be strongly tempted to publish them with a translation, *pro bono publico*. (Smith 1902: 157–158)

The appetites of William Carey reflect the long history of European quest for the supposedly lost or intentionally concealed Veda(s). The Vedas seem to have haunted the imagination of travelers, traders, conquerors and missionaries from their first encounters with legends and hearsay about the brahmanical books long before any of the Vedic texts were actually seen. This long history has been marked by confusion, anxiety and competition on the part of all those who strove to lay their hands on this supposedly “oldest book of humanity.” It comprises early bits of legends and information about the Veda gathered by Jesuit missionaries, reports of travelers and envoys, those compiled in the accounts by the Dutch chaplain Abraham Rogerius of 1651 and Philippus Baldaeus of 1671.⁴ It includes also the frantic search for Vedic texts and claims of discovery with cases of probable or unintentional mystification like that of the *Ezour Vedam* (published 1788), miraculous unearthing of the “complete Vedas” by colonel Antoine Polier (c. 1785), activities of new connoisseurs of art and letters and the development of the European antiquary market for Indian manuscripts. Its later phase comprises the now legendary communication to the Asiatic Society and the subsequent essay on the Vedas by Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1805), the account of captain Ellis’s discovery in the Jesuit archive in Pondicherry (published 1822),⁵ the first European Latinised edition cum translation of a small selection of Ṛgvedic hymns by Friedrich Artur Rosen (published in London in 1830) followed by the promising but never finished regular edition by the same author (published 1838), the “Vedic report”

⁴ Rogerius 1915 (1651) and Baldaeus 1703 (1671). Rogerius described the Veda as “a book of laws containing all the beliefs and ceremonies of the brahmins” thus setting a paradigm for the quest for the ultimate source of all religions in India located supposedly in the Veda.

⁵ Polier 1809, Colebrooke 1805, Ellis 1822, Rosen 1830, Röer 1847, Müller 1849. See Rocher 1984, Galewicz forthcoming.

by Eduard R  er (presented in Calcutta in 1846, published in 1847), its echo-resolution by the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1848 and the appearance of the first volume of the so-called critical edition of the *  gvedasamhit  * by F. Max M  ller (Oxford 1849), in itself a publication of both imperial as well as philological character. The quest for the Veda(s) had its imperial dimension connected with the ambition of power and control over the new dominions and their intellectual heritage. It had also its missionary component, which at times remained related to the former, at times, quite to the contrary, followed its own tracks. The missionary quest for the Veda should probably be seen against the background of an intense ideological and political competition between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches. The uniquely Protestant dimension of this quest remained associated with the specific visions of modernity and the Protestant ideals of new social order to be built in a slow process involving labour focused on education and social upbringing of the lower classes. The same protestant dimension comprised the specific attitude towards print and its alleged social and religious powers. One of the less known instances of the latter remains the work and life history of John Stevenson and his exceptional pioneering work that should be probably judged as the earliest Indian printed edition of the hymns of the *  gvedasamhit  * which he published in Bombay in 1833.

Rev. John Stevenson, a graduate of Glasgow University, was a Presbyterian hero missionary of the Church of Scotland of the early 1800s. He is often said to have been the first Scottish missionary sent to India.⁶ Stevenson is better known for his later becoming a coeditor of the *Bombay Gazette* and for his succeeding career: he was elected president of The Bombay Branch of Royal Asiatic Society and served, during 1851–1854, as Chaplain to the East India Company. After retiring to Scotland he also acted as the Ministrant of Ladykirk by the end of his life during 1853–1858. He became an eminent

⁶ Some sources seem to suggest precedence of two other missionaries: see Smith and Choules 1832.

scholar of Marāṭhī and Sanskrit though details of his regular training in both languages are not well-known. As a Sanskritist and an editor he was not particularly lucky with historians. Jan Gonda in his standard [*History of*] *Vedic Literature* of 1975 does not mention his name or works but once, in a footnote, among translations of the *Sāmaveda* with an indication of “much antiquated”.⁷ He keeps silence with respect either to Stevenson’s complete edition of the *Sāmavedasamhitā* published in London in 1843 or his pioneering edition of the first thirty-five hymns of the *Ṛgvedasamhitā* of 1833. Stevenson’s works remain unacknowledged by Louis Renou in his *Maitres de la Philologie Védique* and by Dandekar in his *Vedic Bibliography*... But Stevenson’s *Threefold Science* (*Ṛgveda* I.1–35 edition) of 1833 can be seen in Renou’s *Bibliographie Védique* under entry No 42 (Renou 1931: 31). It had been acknowledged also by Rosen in his *Ṛgveda Liber Primus* published in London in 1838 (Rosen 1838: Vi). We learn from the preface of this publication that it took four years for Stevenson’s edition to reach London after it had been printed in Bombay in 1833. Just in time to be taken account of by Rosen, who came to be acknowledged later on as the author of the first ever scholarly edition of the *Ṛgveda*, which remained, however, uncompleted since Rosen passed away prematurely in the same year. F. Max Müller does not mention Stevenson’s name in the long preface to the first volume of his legendary edition published in 1849. But later on, Müller happens at least twice to acknowledge Stevenson’s translation by quoting one verse of it in full along with explanations to another one in the commentary to his own selection of translations from the *Ṛgvedasamhitā* of 1869 (Müller 1869: xxiii and 68).

While Europe saw its first ever printed Vedic text in the shape of a small selection of the *Ṛgvedic* hymns with Latin translation and notes by Rosen printed in London by John Taylor in 1830 under the title of

⁷ See Gonda 1975: 313, fn. 3. Stevenson’s work appears to be acknowledged in: [//whowaswho-indology.info/5967/stevenson-john/](http://whowaswho-indology.info/5967/stevenson-john/) including the 1833 *Rigveda*, although without its exact title. (I owe this remark to one of the undisclosed reviewers of this article).

Rig-vedae Specimen, India had its pioneering edition in the form of an integral text of the initial part of the *Ṛksaṃhitā* prepared by Rev. John Stevenson and published in a lithographed form by the American Mission Press of Bombay in 1833. As a Scottish Presbyterian missionary, Stevenson worked independently in Maharashtra combining his missionary work with his interest in early Indian religions and literatures in vernaculars.⁸ In producing his edition of the initial part of the *Ṛksaṃhitā* in the form of the first thirty-five hymns of Maṇḍala I (seven *anuvākas*) in unaccented Devanāgarī, Stevenson must have benefitted from the help of an assistant, probably a brahmin convert from Maharashtra. Thanks to the assistance of the latter it was probably also possible to supply the original *saṃhitā* text of the hymns with a Sanskrit gloss following mainly Sāyaṇa as well as a Marāṭhī rendering and an English translation. The work shows a rather peculiar layout. It has an oblong shape being probably a consequence of the handwritten source for its lithographed print and it is composed of two parts. Part One bears in its left hand column the Sanskrit text of RS I.1–35 along with a Sanskrit gloss below and a Marāṭhī translation in its right column.⁹ Part Two consists of the English translation of the hymns of RS I.35 to be seen in the left column of Part One. Out of twelve copies of the work known to have survived to this day in libraries, two appear to be limited to its second part only.¹⁰

With the spread of information about new finds and editing work in progress in Europe and Bombay, it was apparently high time for the East

⁸ His wide scope of activities included also rather surprising projects such as that of teaching old Hebrew (and the Bible) to the local Bene Israel community in Bombay. See Numark 2012: 1791.

⁹ For some reason the opening verse introducing the text proper after the title line features the Sāvitrī stanza along with proper Vedic accents. See Stevenson 1833: 2.

¹⁰ One more copy, signed by Stevenson, that surfaced recently and found its way to an antiquary auction house in London reached a relatively sound price. Its announcement happened to be fitted with a description of other copies available in the libraries: See <https://www.peterharrington.co.uk/sanskrit-title-trividya-trigunatmika-bhaga.html> [last accessed on Jan 17, 2019].

India Company government in Calcutta to ascertain its own position in the race for the recovering and opening of the Veda to the public. It was the Asiatic Society of Bengal that eventually adopted, through a decision of the Secretaries of its Committee of Papers in 1847, a rather ambitious, if not imperial in scope, program for publishing the Veda in its entirety. In order to secure success for this rather grandiose project, the Society officially accepted and resolved to implement the findings of the so-called "Report on the Vedas" commissioned with and prepared by Eduard R  r. R  r was successively elected to the post of the editor of the new publication series committed to the task.¹¹ His "Report on the Vedas" was published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* in the same year of 1847 along with a string of successive documents illustrating the growing process leading to the concluding decision in the matter. As we can read in the introductory section, the project became feasible thanks to a grant by the Directors of the Company. "The expense of the undertaking is to be defrayed from the grant of 500 Rs. *per mensem*, allowed to the Society by the Hon'ble Court of Directors, for the promotion of Oriental literature."¹² The report shows that the initial decision had been taken by the Court of Directors a year earlier, in 1846, and communicated to the Bengal Government in a due official letter form. In response to this decision, taken in London, the acting authorities of the Asiatic Society issued a document stating the initial frame for the project of editing the Vedas in print. One cannot miss the overall tone of its wording which stresses the need to hurry up and take "immediate measures" to bring the Vedas to print, apparently in fear of being outpaced by the competitors in that matter.¹³

¹¹ The *Biblioteca Indica* came subsequently to host editions of a wide range of Sanskrit works.

¹² The expense of the undertaking was to be covered by a grant "allowed to the Society by the Hon'ble Court of Directors, for the promotion of Oriental literature" (R  r 1847: 506).

¹³ The pertinent passage of the Report reads: "In deference to the expressed wishes of the Honourable the Court of Directors, reiterated in Mr. Secretary Bushby's letter, dated the 21st November, 1846, the Asiatic

It is rather revealing to highlight what the “Vedic Report” shows: apparently as late as 1846 the Veda was still considered among scholars of Calcutta a rare and hardly accessible treasure. In his report, Röer indicated two “essential difficulties” that awaited the project: the securing of the complete collection of the Vedic texts and the understanding of their language. With reference to the latter, he drew up a survey of the continuing work on the editing and understanding of the language of the Vedas, indicating the pioneering work of Rosen on the *Ṛgveda* and Stevenson on the *Sāmaveda*. Conspicuously for the present study, Röer in his Report did not acknowledge Stevenson’s pioneering 1833 edition of the *Ṛgveda*. For some reason, he did not mention either the ongoing work by F. Max Müller, nor that of H. H. Wilson.¹⁴ While neither of the works had appeared in print by the time of the Report’s publication, they must have been well underway and, accordingly, at least heard of by scholars of the time. Röer did not mention either the indigenous *pothī*-shaped Indian edition of *Śukla Yajurveda Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* by Sāmaśrami Satyavrata, printed in Calcutta in 1844 at Satya Press. As for the second impediment, he acknowledged the lack of complete texts available in Calcutta and proposed either locating and acquiring copies in Benares and Deccan, or applying for a “complete copy,” (sic!) believed to have been deposited in London by Colonel Antoine Polier.¹⁵

We must remember that in the historical situation of the slowly consolidating but still far from stable British dominions on the Indian Subcontinent in the early 1800s, the act of publishing the Veda in print might also become a political intervention into the public sphere. This could take place in order to either reinforce, question or contest

Society are desirous of taking immediate measures for the publication of the Vedas, with a commentary, the expense to be defrayed from the grant from Government of 500 Rs. *per mensem* for ‘Oriental Publications’” (Röer 1847: 506).

¹⁴ Eventually to appear in 1849 and 1851 respectively.

¹⁵ See Röer 1847: 505.

the exclusive hegemony of the brahmins over the right of access, use and interpretation of the Vedic traditional scriptural texts. The new spaces of circulation, reading, and use of printed matter proved to be constituted with either old or new kind of users. The Bombay publishers of 1833 Stevenson's *R̥gveda*, the Calcutta printers of the 1844 *Śukla Yajurveda*, and later nineteenth-century Bombay, Calcutta, Madras or Benares editors and printers, happened to issue the same Vedic texts in entirely different shapes and format, thus not only targeting diverse expectations of the already known users and practices, but also differentiating, or creating, the new spaces of circulation that remained separate or overlapped with the former. In some cases, one and the same printer-publisher could offer for circulation different printed editions of the same Vedic compendium. Such was the case with the *R̥gvedasamhitā* in codex format for the use of new universities and colleges of Bombay and Pune in contrast to the oblong *pothī* format for the use of more traditional brahmin households, *paṇḍits* and Vedic recitation schools. Others imagined for the Veda the so-called public space (like the quoted-above William Carey dreaming of laying his hands on all the extant Vedas in order to transfer them into what he imagined to be the Indian public sphere) or a new kind of reader, the "Hindu youth"—in the expression of J. Stevenson—who could for themselves see, after the Veda had been exposed to them, and, by comparison, "find out the superiority of the Christian truth."¹⁶ The dream of the print technology, reinforced by the Protestant ideology of the allegedly rapid and effective spread of God's word through the medium of controlled distribution of numerous copies brought its

¹⁶ What Stevenson had exactly on his mind we may only conjecture. It is of interest to compare this formulation with a parallel one to be seen as the conclusion to another publication of his of the same year, namely *The Principles of the Murathee Grammar* (Stevenson 1843: Vi): "If this attempt should facilitate the progress of those who are endeavouring to sow the seeds of useful knowledge, and teach the Natives of the Murathee country the principles of Divine Science, the author will esteem all his labour well bestowed."

clear message: from that time on—in theory at least—anyone could become an actor to populate one of the new shared spaces of circulation. Thus, access to the Veda could be announced (and believed) to have been opened. At least to those who could afford a printed copy and knew how to read it and how to make sense of it. The dream of the open access offered by print probably had its Protestant missionary background too: that of the belief that exposing the hidden sacred lore of the brahmins could become an effective weapon against the brahmanical power over the souls of the indigenous population. These souls could and should—according to the overall missionary ideology—be given a chance to be converted to Christianity through opening their eyes to the true and allegedly original contents of their own degenerated beliefs and practices. Yet, not only the opening to the wide public and the public themselves were more of a dream vision rather than the reality of the times. The early stage of anything resembling public space might have first taken root in the growing metropolitan cities at the most, but there were other obstacles on the road to the rapid success of print in India.

At least in the first two decades of the century, the new mass printing projects suffered badly from material impediments: inflated prices of imported paper, unstable quality of paper made in India and faltering quality of type. Not to mention channels of distribution. All of them had a high impact on the costs of production and greatly increased prices that effectively kept printed matter beyond the means of common readers, even if such an entity existed. In the case of printing Bible translations into vernacular languages, the minimum economic basis of the production process could be secured exclusively thanks to the global network of protestant fund-raising institutions. Reports show that the actual sale of the printed copies could often account for less than 1% of the total costs incurred.¹⁷ The perennial deficiency of

¹⁷ *A Memoir of the Serampore Translations* 1815: 26–27, which reports the figure of 52 Sicca Rupees for the sale of Bibles against the figure of 28,516 Sicca Rupees for the total cost of translating and publishing.

cheaper paper still remained the main obstacle for commercial printing in the hands of Indian entrepreneurs later in the same century. Yet, the unprecedented enthusiasm, combined with missionary zeal and belief in civilizational progress, even if this eventually brought grave financial shortcomings, did result in the dazzling figures of print production by the missionary print establishments indicated above. It gave rise to a network of relations with patrons, commissioning agents, distributors, other publishers and printers, government institutions included, and set a number of standards in organization and distribution for the commercial printing to continue in the next few decades. The missionary printers and publishers' engagement in publishing projects focused on Sanskrit religious texts remains an uneasy subject to judge. Apart from the cases of commissioned printing jobs accepted by missionary printers, there were also cases of publishing projects initiated, stimulated by, or actively joined by the missionary institutions. Such an example was the pioneering project of publishing the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa*, carried out by the Serampore Mission Press between 1806 and 1810, after an agreement and financial grant on the part of the Fort William College. For his part, William Carey seems to have developed a genuine interest in Sanskrit studies, which was also the case of a number of other missionaries of the time involved in the printing revolution, such as John Stevenson and his collaborators of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Working in Maharashtra from 1824, Stevenson made a name for himself as an original editor and translator of Vedic literature as well as a linguist exploring Indian vernaculars, especially Marāṭhī. His *Principles of the Murathee language* appeared from Calcutta in 1833—the same year as his Bombay *R̥gveda* edition—and was reprinted at least three more times in Bombay by the American Mission Press and the Education Society. While his pioneering edition and translation of hymns from the *R̥gvedasamhitā* appeared under the title of *Trividyā Triguṇātmikā* = *Threefold Science* in Bombay in 1833, his translation of *Sāmaveda*, which proved to be much better known later, appeared in London in 1842. Another less known work of his—the edition of the Sanskrit text of the *Sāmavedasamhitā*—came out

also in London with help of H. H. Wilson in 1843.¹⁸ This unusual activity of early missionaries in editing Indic religious texts was not given enough attention by contemporary scholarship. The type of official excuse, or a rationale, for their personal association through print with the religious literature of the Indian heathens given by both Carey and Stevenson appear in a final resort quite similar. Carey presented his justification in the correspondence to his superiors by declaring his intentions as focused on exposing the “mysterious sacred nothings [...] which have maintained their celebrity so long merely by being kept from the inspection of any but interested Brahmins”.¹⁹ On his part, Stevenson expressed a wish in the preface of his 1833 translation attached to his edition of the initial hymns of the *Ṛgvedasamhitā* that his translation “be useful in opening up the meaning of those ancient writings, and leading the native youths to compare them with the simple and sublime system of Christianity” (Stevenson 1833: V). Out of the two, it was Stevenson who accomplished what Carey only dreamed of when writing in 1802 about his being “strongly tempted to publish” the Veda with a translation.²⁰ Though involved in busy and passionate missionary work and pursuing other interests, the two missionary figures took active part in what amounted to the modern race for the unearthing and opening the Veda to the public with the powerful means offered by the printing press; the Veda that—in the missionary eyes at least—had been too long guarded, concealed and withheld from the public by the brahmins.

As for Stevenson’s ally in his project of printing the Veda, the American Mission Printing Press of Bombay seems to be one of the most experienced printing establishments of the time. After initial troubles with Company’s authorities, the American Baptist Mission started formally in Bombay from 12 February 1813. The beginning of its press operation is usually dated to 1816 and the arrival of

¹⁸ See Preface to Stevenson 1843.

¹⁹ For the citation, see Rocher and Rocher 2012: 77.

²⁰ See p. 139 above and Smith 1902: 157–158.

Rev. Horatio Bardwell. In 1817 a tract of Scripture, the Gospel of St Mathew as well as “a harmony of Gospels” in Marāṭhī had been successfully printed in the Serampore establishment from a wooden press. The operation of the American Mission Press is said to have gained momentum thanks to its self-taught typesetter, who, later on, happened to instruct one of the first and most successful native printers by the name of Śeth Jāvajī, who started his own printing press enterprise and foundry in 1867 in Bombay, which soon made a name for itself as the Nirṇaya Sāgara Press of Bombay. Very soon after its start, the American Mission Press in Bombay “printed for everybody” and established important patterns for other printing and publishing houses to grow in Bombay. It was here, in the American Mission Press in Bombay, where Stevenson’s edition—one of the first ever mechanically reproduced integral Vedic texts—appeared in 1833. It came out as a hybrid work in a lithographed print composed of two parts. Part One in Devanāgarī text comprised the initial part of the *Rgvedasamhitā* (RS 1.1–35) along with excerpts of Sāyaṇa’s commentary and a Marāṭhī rendering facing the “original” in the right column of the two-columned text printed vertically.²¹ This shape must have been a consequence of incorporating the oblong, *pothī* manuscript-like, folios on which the Devanāgarī text had been handwritten.²² Manuscripts of that

²¹ This general feature of the page layout of Part One appears, however, to become gradually confused on succeeding pages, when it proves impossible for the scribe (and the lithographed print following his handwritten source) to keep the right column in Marāṭhī exactly the same length as its Sanskrit source.

²² It is not clear why Stevenson decided to print his work in the American Mission facility. The Church of Scotland first missionaries are reported to have brought a lithograph press with them as early as 1823 (Smith and Choules 1832: 229) but they are said, also in the same source, to have had technical problem with printing at least up to 1827. Perhaps American Mission printing establishment in Bombay seemed more promising in terms of quality. Another reason could be that by 1832 Stevenson probably already moved to Bombay from Pune. It is also interesting to note that Stevenson’s *Principles of Murathee Grammar* that appeared the same year of 1833 was

format had been in circulation in Maharashtra and one such handwritten copy must have been either acquired or written down specifically for Stevenson as a basis for the lithographed edition. Judging by the formulations making a colophon-like set of concluding verses to Part One,²³ it may have been either copied/hand-written in preparation for the lithographed edition by a Christian convert, or intentionally fitted by Stevenson himself with a sort of Protestant Christian “confession of faith.” Whatever be the case, its positioning at the end of Part One along with a Marāṭhī version of the same appears to be mirrored by the English version in Part Two, which strongly suggests a translation from Sanskrit/Marāṭhī to English.²⁴ The whole book exhibits a composite character: not only Part One is lithographed from the handwritten source while Part Two appears to have been typeset. Part Two has also been fitted with a Preface and appended with explanatory notes and drawings. Contrary to the layout of the whole and rather surprisingly, it is Part Two, not Part One, which has been fitted with a Devanāgarī text of the *vedāṅga* of *jyotiṣa*, namely the text of *Lagadhajyotiṣa*.²⁵

The colophon-like concluding verses of Part One (*bhāga* 1) does not say anything about either the copyist or the author or the printer-publisher. It does, however, point to the overall message of the whole:

printed not in Bombay but in Calcutta. The second edition of the same came out, however, from American Missionary Press, Bombay, in 1843.

²³ See Appendix 1.

²⁴ Stevenson was reported to be personally involved not only in the distribution of printed Bible texts but also interested in Bible translations. He also got involved in a project of teaching Hebrew and Bible knowledge to Konkan Bene Israel community members with a view of preparing ground for their translation of Hebrew Bible into Marāṭhī. (We must remember of the Presbyterian idea of the necessity of translating Bible to vernaculars from original languages). See Numark 2012: 1791.

²⁵ Later on, Stevenson proves to have become rather passionately interested in Hindu astrology and astronomical calculation: The Journal of BB of RAS brings his astronomical calculation of a Buddhist inscription from Nasik, see „Extracts from the Proceedings of the Society” 1848: 456.

its headline declares the concluding verses to be excerpts from Christian scriptures, however neither the Sanskrit nor the Marāṭhī versions of the same, or the supposed English translation in Part Two, indicate the source of them. While some fragments may seem dubious, they can be represented in transliteration as follows:

*abhiṣiktatrātur vedasya kvacit arcāḥ
yahovā pitā putras ca sadātmā ca*

1. *nirākāro 'maras ca yo devo nityaikarecajñāḥ
tasmin rājñi sadā sadā syād evārcis ca bradhnatā*
2. *prakṛtvā prītim it viṣe pitā svīyam sutaṃ dadau
tasmāt tadbhāva dhṛk janāḥ prāpnoty āmaratām uta*
3. *durjanān pātum aṃhaso khristar iha āgamat²⁶
sarvair grāhyā 'sti vāg iyaṃ asau putras ca sadguruḥ*
4. *supremānandaśāntaya udbhavaṃ te sadātmanah
ekodhā yas triṣv asti taṃ devam tle pracetakam*

Its supposed rendering into English can be seen in Part Two as concluding the English translation of the Ṛgvedic hymns of Part One. It is not difficult to see that the supposed translation does not always follow the Sanskrit version, either in detail, order of succession, or general tenor.²⁷

The whole of the concluding verses appears to be composed of a few separate formulations. At least two of them tend in the Protestant traditions to function as “benedictions”: Timothy 1:17 and John 3:16. Contrary to the declaration at the top of page 136, the formulations appear not to faithfully follow any of the known English translations

²⁶ This line appears to be metrically incomplete. I owe this important remark to one of the two undisclosed reviewers who also proposed an alternative delimitation of the texts that secures its metrical completeness: *durjanān pātum aṃhaso yesu khrist arihā 'gamat*. Acknowledging this as a better metrical reading, I personally find the idea of Christ killing his enemies (*arihan*) somewhat uneasy to accept contextually. The more so, that neither the Marāṭhī (see App. I) nor the English (See App. II) equivalent of the Sanskrit text retains any suggestion of Christ killing his enemies.

²⁷ See Appendix 2 below.

of the Bible. Some lines come quite close, others paraphrase, while the last verse 4 cannot be traced to any of the scriptural works in English. Thus, the beginning verse is a near exact, however different, quotation from Timothy 1:17, the second paraphrases John 3:16, while the third appears to be a paraphrase of Galatians 5:22–26.²⁸ The last verse 4 apparently declares the faith in the Holy Trinity, which cannot be traced directly to either the Old or the New Testament but must have been one of the central concepts for the Presbyterian missionaries with whom Rev. John Stevenson shared his beliefs.

The general tenor of the whole passage appears to stand for an interpretation of the message of the New Testament in the Trinitarian spirit rather than actually represent a quotation from any one of the Scriptures and should probably be seen against the more general context of the Presbyterian Church missionary activities in Bombay Presidency of the times. Part of this context should be reconstructed as a huge educational project with a network of schools established across Western Maharashtra, and another part as an evangelization project in the form of preaching tours and mass distribution of printed Christian tracts.²⁹ When taken by its contents, the supposed translation of the colophon entitled “Some Sentences From The Christian Scriptures” resembles a declaration of faith. We have no external clue to decide what actually was the intended relation of the English verses of Part Two to their counterparts in Part One other than translation

²⁸ For comparison, see for instance the so-called authorised translation of the Bible of 1611, reprinted in 1911.

²⁹ See, for instance *Missionary Register for MDCCCXXXIII*: 93: “The Rev. John Stevenson is reported to have arrived in India in 1823 and to have been directed, along with another missionary, to start a new station in Hurnee, 80 miles South of Bombay, on behalf of the Scottish Missionary Society. See *Missionary Register for the MDCCCXXV*: 71. Later on, his name reappears in the *Missionary Register* as being active in Pune (Poonah) and touring Maharashtra. He was reported, among other things, to have stayed for some time at ‘Punderpore, a celebrated place of Hindoo pilgrimage, where he [...] distributed three bullocks’ load of Tracts and portions of Scripture [...]’”

suggested by the mirror positioning of the two. This idea, however, seems rather bizarre on historical grounds.³⁰

The colophon-like conclusion to Part One contains also verses in Marāṭhī positioned to the right of the Sanskrit of the left column and suggesting also a translation from Sanskrit.³¹ At a closer look it can be rather said to represent a Marāṭhī version of the Sanskrit to its left. This too remains suggestive of the hand of a Christian convert copyist/scribe acting probably also as Stevenson's assistant but also of the intention of the whole editing and translation project of Stevenson. Its meaning can be roughly represented in English as the following (Stevenson 1832: 80):

1. May the Formless, Immortal, Eternal and All-knowing God, that beautiful king, possess eternally the fame and honor!
2. The Father very much loved the world and gave his son. Therefore he who trusts him, he reaches immortality.
3. Jesus Christ came to the world to save the sinners from sin. This story everybody has accepted. He only is the Son and Sadguru!
4. The love, happiness and peace arise from the Holy Ghost. One God is in three. That ever-living God I invoke!³²

The whole publication, rather curiously, features a title that, if not misleadingly referring to something other than the *Ṛgvedasamhitā* proper, does not seem to indicate its main contents directly: the *Tri-vidyā Trigunātmikā Sabhāga*. It comes in two parts and its Part Two had been titled with an English equivalent of the former as *The Threefold Science* (perhaps echoing the late Vedic concept of *trayīvidyā* or "triple knowledge") while offering an English rendering of the Sanskrit

³⁰ The Sanskrit translation of the New Testament appeared in print as early as 1808 from the Baptist Missionary Press in Calcutta (Serampore), and it could well be used for the purpose of quotations by Stevenson (provided he had an access to a copy of it, which remains beyond the knowledge of the present author). However, Timothy 1: 17 reads altogether different in Sanskrit New Testament 1808 than it does in Stevenson 1832: 138.

³¹ See Appendix 1 below.

³² My sincere thanks to Dušan Deák, who offered his help with this provisional rendering into English of the Marāṭhī verses.

text of the *Ṛksamhitā* I.1–35 of Part One by the author.³³ While drawing again the attention of the reader to the fact that this early Vedic edition came from the hand of a member of the Scottish Missionary Society, we need to keep in mind that its author took active part in the Society's education program, whose policy included a pronounced ban on any use of printed books of other religions within the Society's fast developing schooling network in Maharashtra. It can be seen in a report including the formulation "all Heathen Books are excluded, and no instruction relative to Hindoo superstitions is allowed."³⁴ Part Two of Stevenson's edition contains a preface in which Stevenson suggests an ideological dimension of his printed edition of the *Ṛgvedic* hymns. The official tone of the Preface makes this clear for the readers with the following:

Should this small tract be useful in opening up the meaning of those ancient writings, and leading the native youths to compare them with the simple and sublime system of Christianity, the translator will not esteem lost the time he has expended upon it. (Stevenson 1833 II: V)

However, the beginning of the Preface shows the author as not only a missionary, but also, and predominantly so, a philologist with a keen interest in the emerging project of editing and translating of the Veda by the European philologists of the time. Stevenson mentions in it another pioneering efforts, namely the work of Rosen, about which he learned only when his own edition was already in print. Thus, a picture of the complex personality of Stevenson emerges, as made of a loyalty to the principles of the Missionary goals while at the same time keenly following the principles of scholarly sharing in the world of emerging modernity.

The Bombay American Missionary Press, whose operation proved to be seminal for the future development of the early indigenous

³³ Part Two of Stevenson's edition comprises, besides the English translation of Part One, also additions in the shape of a Preface, Notes Relative to the Brahmanical Sacrifices, a handwritten diagram of the Vedic sacrificial fires, and the text of the initial part of the *Jyotiṣavedāṅga* of Lagadha,

³⁴ See the *Missionary Register for the MDCCCXXV*: 70.

printing in Bombay, acquired its lithograph probably before 1825 and put it to efficient use in the times when manufacturing and use of Devanāgarī or Marāṭhī character types were still facing serious technical and logistic difficulties. Moreover, at first, the use of lithograph proved to be problematic in the climatic conditions of coastal Maharashtra. Scottish missionaries who were active in primary education in the Marāṭhī region actually deplored the fact that handwritten copies occasionally withstood the climate much better than the lithographed copies.³⁵ The same Scottish Missionary Society is reported to have operated its first lithographic presses already before 1825.³⁶ A report by the Bombay Station of the Scottish mission contains records on the effective operation on its lithographic press in Bombay for the year of 1832. Also missionaries in other regions found it practical to make effective use of lithographed copies of their tracts to be distributed freely. At the same time they remained reluctant towards producing lithographed copies of the Bible. The latter case was avoided probably on the basis of the impression of impermanence that could possibly be produced with lithographic copies that apparently were seen as lacking the permanent status of the movable type deemed proper for the eternal truth of the Scripture. For the year 1832, just a year before Stevenson's *Threefold Science*, or the *Sanhita of the Rik-Veda* as well as his *Principles of Murathee Grammar* appear, the Scottish Missionary Society is reported to have been operating a substantial network of schools in Maharashtra comprising sixteen schools with 1333 scholars and 289 scripture readers. The education process apparently needed printed matter in plenty and it seems that big numbers of distributed pamphlets used to be taken by Protestants as the token of most genuinely dedicated missionary work.³⁷

³⁵ See *Missionary Register for the MDCCCXXV*: 70–71.

³⁶ For the historical circumstances of the introduction of lithographic press in Bombay, see Diehl 1986: 206 and Shaw 1993 and 1994 II. See also Galewicz forthcoming.

³⁷ For the account of the missionary actions in Bombay Presidency up to 1832, see Smith and Choules 1832: 579–581.

Stevenson does not furnish as much information specific to his work either as an editor or a translator of Vedic texts. From his stray references to commentaries of Sāyaṇa we may get impression that translating Vedic text was for him a rather unproblematic procedure relying on the also unproblematic reading of the fourteenth century commentary. It seems, however, beyond doubt that he must have benefitted substantially from the expertise of his Brahmin assistant(s) in both the editing and translating. In 1832, a year before the publication of his *Threefold Science* or *Sanhita of the Rik-Veda* (this is how the subtitle of his edition has been spelled), he appears to have been stationed in Pune (Poonah), where he is reported to have taken part in a conversion of a Brahmin whose name emerges later when Stevenson moves to Bombay.³⁸ As for his *Sāmaveda* translation, Stevenson happens to actually mention an assistant in the footnote on p. 17 while giving an alternative explanation to a Sāmavedic passage. The explanation smacks of a logic known otherwise also from Sāyaṇa, namely of accepting parallel possibilities of meaning:

The flesh-eaters may, *according to my Brahmanical assistant* [my emphasis], either he interpreted as meaning notorious sinners, such as Ravaria, who are reserved for the special vengeance of the gods; or holy Brahmans, who are not to be called away from the world by inferior ministers, but by the gods themselves. If the former be the sense, flesh-eaters means cannibals; if the latter, partakers of the sacrificial viands. (Stevenson 1842: 17)

The formulation seems also to suggest a degree of trust put on the opinion of the assistant by Stevenson. In general, his translations of the *Sāmavedasaṃhitā* are made with an intention to stand on their own and whenever he offers an annotation at the footnote, he limits them to indicate the opinion expressed in the *Bhāṣya* or a parallel to ancient Greek mythology or a later Hindu myth and legend (with no specification). In his preface he admits using a dictionary by H. H. Wilson and Sāyaṇa's *Bhāṣya*. He shows himself pretty conversant with the historical circumstances of the *Bhāṣya*. As far as his manuscript sources are concerned, Stevenson does not provide

³⁸ See Smith and Choules 1832: 581.

us with details while limiting himself to acknowledging that he used two different MSS for the *saṃhitā*, one for *pada* and one for *bhāṣya*, which he vaguely links to either the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society or the help of a friend of his, captain Shortreed of Trigonometrical Survey.³⁹

Stevenson's career as an Orientalist scholar appears to have been composed of at least two separate streams, one interested in Sanskrit and Vedic and the other in Marāṭhī. The latter remained connected to his concepts of the evolution of the regional popular form of Vaiṣṇavism in the shape of the cult of Viṭṭhala/Pāṇḍuraṅga/Viṭhobā of Pandharpur. From what he left in writing, we see Stevenson looking for the Buddhist origin of certain elements of the doctrine and practice of the Viṭṭhala tradition.⁴⁰ He also came up with concepts of the historical transformation in literary culture of Marāṭhī, especially the evolution of the genres towards forms expressive of personal attitude of the individual author motivated by the devotional context of the Maharashtrian variety of the Bhakti movement. According to Stevenson's idea of the development of the individual in Bhakti literary forms, the famous expression "Tukā says", which tended to conclude all of Tukārām's *abhangs*, could be understood as something "more than a 'claim to authority and inspiration.'" ⁴¹ Stevenson appeared to see in this formula a strategy of "assertion of the poet-saint's individual religious experience and devotional faith in response to God's grace" (Copland 2007: 298). We could probably associate concepts of this sort as linked to a more general project which Stevenson, as well as his missionary colleagues, seems to have been dedicated to: a search for a reconstitution of the contemporary forms of popular Hindu practices of Maharashtra along the lines of the Protestant Christianity. How should we

³⁹ See Preface to Stevenson 1842: 18. It was probably Robert Shortreed (1801–1868). I thank one of the two Reviewers of the present paper for this identification.

⁴⁰ See Stevenson 1843: 61 and Copland 2007: 293.

⁴¹ Copland 2007: 298 referring to Stevenson 1841.

look at his Vedic editions in this context remains to be studied more systematically. It seems to hold a promise for a better understanding of a multitude of intentions that accompanied early projects of publishing the Veda in print as part of variously conceptualized forms of modernity. One of the more important dimensions of the early editors and translators such as Stevenson remains undoubtedly their idea of translation of the Vedic texts, which must have been influenced by a more general Protestant idea of translating the Bible. What I try to highlight here is the Protestant commitment towards the need for translating the Scripture from its original languages into the vernaculars with a view to opening the Scripture's message to the understanding of the people. In this light, Stevenson's idea of rendering the *Rgveda-saṃhitā* understood as an original source of religious beliefs and practices of various Hindu traditions into the vernacular of Marāṭhī should be seen as an act of opening the scripture to the public with a view to making it speak for itself. What sort of public did he actually imagine to be the addressee of this opening is another story. In the Preface to his English translation he mentions the "native youths", meaning probably a new generation of young Indians receiving a new Education with and increasingly through English (Stevenson 1833: V). It is to them also, it seems, that the English translations are addressed in order to make it possible for them to see for themselves the difference between the message of the Veda and that of the Christianity.

Translations of Vedic texts into regional vernaculars intensified by the end of the nineteenth century in connection with the new social regional identity movements. They culminated in the late colonial period along with the rise of diverse regional forms of nationalistic movements before WWII and remained just one among an array of these ways. Others included control over resources through the systematic collection of manuscripts to be stored in institutionally controlled libraries and represented in an ordered way through printed descriptive catalogues that organized the indigenous knowledge of colonial subjects according to rational principles. Incidentally, the Veda as a textual concept assumed a prominent position in the imperial cataloguing project:

the multitude of catalogues of manuscripts produced to represent the holdings of the new libraries show what a prominent position in terms of numbers and attention had been given by their editors to Vedic texts. Along with these developments, the rise of English medium education with Universities and colleges that marked the mid-nineteenth-century British India brought the emergence of new, modern, reading communities and an inevitable re-establishment of literary and scriptural canons through education programs. The latter involved the Veda not only in print but in a new configuration of university textbooks. Thus, to use a simplified version of the ideology accompanying at least some of the efforts for editing the Veda in print, the Veda was retrieved from the hands (or memories) of its holders and guardians and opened for the new public in order to be consumed in a new form of reading practices, one of which emerged as a University text-critical study influenced not only by the newly established discipline of philology but also by the study of the Bible.

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APPENDIX 1

Page 60 (Colophon) of Part One of J. Stevenson's *Trividya Trigunātmikā* = *The Threefold Science*, Bombay: The American Mission Press 1833.

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११ येने पंथाः सवितः इत्यासिः देणवः सुकृताऽन्तरिक्षे तेभिर्नैजय पथिभिः रुगेभीरसा न नो जपि न ब्रूहि देव

(१) हे सूर्या तुझे ने पूर्व आणि अंतरिक्ष लोकी धुळीरहित येऊन त्या दिवसाचे बांधी अस्माभूत पाळण हिकर तसा अणारी पुण्यवृत्त असं मार्ग आहे त म्हणून उत्तम पुरुष न हे देवा अनुष्ठान करणार अस्माभूत देवांमधे अधिक गमन करिता हे तुम्हाचे बांधी अस्मा त्या मार्गा ही करून ते करून कथन करा॥

१ भागस्य समाप्तिः

अभिशाक्तानुवैदेस्य कविदाः
य हो वा
पिता पुत्रश्च सदात्मा च

येष्टु त्रिस्तावे वात्स्याकी काही एक का प्ये
ज्याला अस्मित जोहो
पिता आणि पुत्र आणि पवित्र आत्मा

१ निराकारो मरुत यो देवो नित्यः क रेवतः
तस्मिन् राति सदा सदा स्वादेवा विभिन्न भूता
२ प्रकृता श्रीनिमित्त विषे पिता सौम्य सुतं ददौ
तस्मात् तद्वाच धर्कजुनः शमीत्या मरुता मुत
३ दुर्जनान् पातु महसो येष्टु त्रिस्त रिहा गमन्
सर्वे आत्मा रिं गेगियं अतो पुत्रश्च सद्धरुः
४ सुप्रेमानन्द शान्तयऽऽहूयते सदात्मनः
एको घायस्त्रिष्व सि त देव मीळे प्रचेतकं

(१) जो निराकार आणि अमर आणि नित्य आणि सर्वज्ञ असा जो देव त्या शीर्षांत राजासा सदा सर्वकाय महिमा आणि सन्मान असे। (२) पित्याने जगावर फारच शीत करून आपला पुत्र दिल्ला म्हणून त्याजवर जो विश्वास ठेवितो तो अमरत्व पावतो। (३) पापी लोकास पापापासून तारावयास म्हणून येष्टु त्रिस्त जगांत आला ही गोष्ट सर्वांनी यात्य आहे तोच पुत्र आशिसदुर जोहो। (४) प्रेमजन्य शांति ही प्रविज आत्म्यापासून उत्पन्न होतात तिघांत एकच देव आहे त्या वेतवत देवाला मी स्तुतितां॥

APPENDIX 2

Page 54 of Part Two of J. Stevenson, *Trividya Trigunātmikā* = *The Threefold Science*, Bombay: American Mission Press 1833.

54

THE SAMHITA OF THE RIG-VĒDA.

9. The golden handed Savita who looks round on all the world, and performs his course in the space between heaven and earth, destroys diseases; and going to Surya, and dispelling darkness by his influence, walks the circuit of the heavens.

10. Let the golden handed, the giver of life, the virtuous, the bestower of felicity, the independently rich, the resplendent Savita, come at the conclusion of our ceremonies; and accepting of our magnificent songs of praise, stand our guardian to drive away the wandering imps of demons.

11. Come to us this day, Savita, by those ancient, dustless, holy easy roads, which exist in the mid-air, and preserve us, and afterwards speak favourably of us to the gods, O resplendent divinity.

END OF THE SEVENTH ANUNWA'KA OF THE FIRST MANDALA.

SOME SENTENCES FROM THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES.

Jehovah.

FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT.

To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only and wise God, be glory and dominion for ever and ever.—God so loved the world, that he sent his only Son, that whosoever believeth on him might have eternal life.—He is the Son of God and a teacher sent from God.—This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ died for sinners.—The fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, and peace.—It is that one God in three persons whom I adore!